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**WHY DESPITE BIPARTISAN SUPPORT, THE EMBARGO  
AGAINST CUBA WON'T GO DOWN WITHOUT A FIGHT**

by

**Victoria Scotte Rasmussen**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree**

**of**

**DEPARTMENTAL HONORS**

**in**

**INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS  
in the Department of Management**

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## **Abstract**

Within the past decade, there has been a dramatic shift in American politics. Once considered enemies, the United States and Cuba have reestablished diplomatic relations. The reestablishment of relationships is a surprise to many politicians because Cuba has not made the necessary changes to end the trade embargo put into place by the 1996 Helms-Burton act.

The majority of the friction in ending the embargo is from the Republican Party. While over half the Republicans in the country support ending the embargo, the Republicans in congress are not quite as divided on the issue. Still, some republicans are adamantly in favor of free trade and increasing agricultural exports from their state and support relations with Cuba. The senators that support relations represent the future and the ideologies of the rising millennial generation.

The source behind the change is the growing millennial demographic among both the Cuban American population and the entire U.S. population. Despite the millennial generation's influence on relations with Cuba, it will take at least a decade to see the end of the Helms Burton act because of the generation currently in control of the Republican legislature. Because of the complex way in which the U.S. political system functions, full relations with Cuba will have to wait a decade for millennials to become the overwhelming majority of the work force and to control the delegates elected to Congress.

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## **Introduction**

In the spring of 2015, I had the opportunity to intern in the Washington DC office of Senator Orrin G Hatch. During my time at the office, my assignment was to assist with all things related to international affairs. One of my first tasks was to research the Senator's past votes and stances regarding relations with Cuba. I could tell that the office staff were interested in pushing the Senator towards expressing a more open relationship with Cuba, but the Senator's recent damning remarks regarding the President's December announcement of reestablishing relations with Cuba made that goal very difficult. My assignment was to see if the Senator had done anything in the past that was in support of a relationship with Cuba. I was excited to have the task, but I soon realized that Senator Hatch had a long history of opposing the Castro Regime. Even after a half century of failing isolationist policy towards Cuba, Senator Hatch was not willing to back down in the embargo against Cuba. I did not understand why a man who had done so much bipartisan work, who had been in favor of communist China joining the WTO, and who was head of the Finance Committee could oppose opening trade with a poor and suffering nation.<sup>1</sup>

This situation sparked the question, why Cuba? Why does U.S. policy discriminate against Cuba, why do U.S. politicians care about Cuba, and why is the nation so polarized on the issue? Initially I thought that the solution may divide along party lines, but the more I researched the more I realized that it was not quite that simple. I was also curious about the change in perception that was occurring. In primary education history classes, I learned that Cuba was a poor country under an evil dictatorship, and that people risked their lives

trying to escape. When and why did the perception change? Finally, since real change was taking place, I wondered how long it would take to legally enforce this new view of Cuba.

Despite rapid development in reestablishing diplomatic relations between the two nations, I predict that the legal embargo prohibiting full relations between the U.S. and Cuba will not go down without a fight. The past 55 years of rocky relations between the two countries has laid a foundation that is repaired by opening a couple embassies.<sup>2</sup> The relationship is tainted by both the perception of many American politicians and the actions of the Castro regime. In order to fix the relationship between the two countries it will require both the end of isolationist thinking and a generation that is willing to work towards a connected future. The millennial generation is the catalyst in reestablishing relations with Cuba, but it will take at least a decade for millennials to be the majority of the work force and in turn to develop the momentum to fully normalize relations between the two countries.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Situation Today**

On December 17th 2014, United States President Barack Obama visited Havana. As the first acting President to do so since before the Great Depression, President Obama's actions signified the end of Cold-war relations with Cuba.<sup>4</sup> A spectrum of political opinions accompanied this decision. The discord, however, was not completely divided between Republicans and Democrats. While the Democratic Party has been consistent in its support for Cuba, Senator Robert Mendez being the only Democrat Senator to speak out against President Obama reestablishing relations with Cuba, the Republican Party is fracturing.<sup>5</sup> While most Senators are supporting the traditional anti-Cuba stance, some Republican



senators believe that it is time for a change. As noted by Arizona Senator Jeff Flake, the "time for shutting out Cuba has ended."<sup>6 7</sup>

After half a century of actively working to keep Cuba isolated from the U.S, why would the President work to ensure that his legacy is reestablishing relations with Cuba?<sup>8</sup> Why build relations with a country that has not completed the legal requirements to dismantle the strong economic embargo? Perhaps because the embargo has not worked in half a century, because free trade will benefit the people who are struggling under communist rule, or because opening trade will benefit U.S. Agricultural exporters.<sup>9 10</sup> In reality, though, the factor that has pushed lawmakers to consider relations with Cuba is in fact the Cuban-American vote.<sup>11</sup>

For decades, Cuban Americans have voted overwhelmingly for the Republican Party. This vote has been key to winning swing state Florida, home of 2 million Cuban Americans. In 2013, however, the percentage of Cuban Americans voting Republican shrunk from 64% to 47%.<sup>12</sup> One explanation for this shift is that the Democratic Party has been willing to reform their perception about the United States' relations with Cuba. In her 2000 and 2008 election campaigns, Secretary Hillary Clinton affirmed the importance of continuing an economic embargo with Cuba. In 2010, however, Secretary Clinton reformed her stance saying

"It is my personal belief that the Castros do not want to see an end to the embargo and do not want to see normalization with the United States, because they would lose all of their excuses for what hasn't happened in Cuba in the last 50 years."<sup>13</sup>

This change in stance regarding the embargo against Cuba has helped the party resonate with the new generation of voters. Today and astounding 44% of Cuban Americans were born in the U.S. and are much less likely to support economic embargo against Cuba.<sup>14</sup>

While most Democrats support establishing ties with Cuba, Republicans are fractured on the issue. According to a 2015 Gallup poll most Americans, 83% of Democrats and 56% of Republicans, do in fact support reestablishing relations with Cuba.<sup>15</sup> A large proportion of the Republican leadership, though, still support cold relations with Cuba, especially those who contending for the 2016 Presidential nomination. Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush, for example, advocated heavily for keeping the embargo intact. Rubio claimed that opening relations with Cuba are

“In the eyes of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, the Cuban people are suffering because not enough American tourists visit the country... the truth is the Cuban people are suffering because they live in a tyrannical dictatorship.”<sup>16</sup>

Jeb Bush echoed the sentiment by saying that the action was a “strategy of accommodation and appeasement.”<sup>17</sup> And that the United States doesn’t “need a glorified tourist to go to Havana in support of a failed Cuba. We need an American president to go to Havana in solidarity with a free Cuban people.”<sup>18</sup>

While these sentiments reflect many Republican lawmaker’s views, opposition it is not all encompassing. At least 15 of the 54 Republican senators currently in the Senate support opening relations with Cuba. These senators either are mostly from heavily agricultural states or have an extreme sense and support of free trade. In the House of Representatives,

several congressional representatives and women agree that keeping Cuba cut off from trade is not the answer. In March of 2016, President Obama was accompanied by a large delegation as a cultural visit to Cuba. In addition to baseball players, Senators Jeff Flake [R-AZ] and Dean Heller [R-NV] as well as House members Mark Sanford [R-SC], Tom Emmer [R-MN] and Reid Ribble [R-WI] were a part of the delegation.<sup>19</sup>

As of July 20th 2015 the U.S. and Cuba officially reestablished diplomatic ties with one another by reopening embassies in both Havana and Washington D.C.<sup>20</sup> Now that diplomatic relations are officially re-established, the Republic controlled congress needs to unite and repeal the Helms-Burton act of 1996 in order to disband the economic embargo.<sup>21</sup> Despite the recent momentum, the executive branch has created in building relations with Cuba, because of the United States' history with Cuba it is unlikely that the momentum will result in the termination of the embargo within the next few years.

### **Cuba Background**

The history and deterioration of a relationship between the United States and Cuba is tragic, but creates a clear picture of why there is so much animosity between the two nations. Understanding how Cuba transformed from an exotic vacation spot to a sworn enemy of the United States is the first step to understanding why after half a century there is still an economic embargo in place against Cuba.

Before Fidel Castro and his guerrilla army overthrew the government in 1959, the United States and Cuba had a strong trading partnership dating back to 1898 when the U.S. defeated Spain for control of Cuba. Four years later the country became independent, but

with the caveat Platt Amendment that gave the U.S. the right to intervene in Cuban Affairs.<sup>22</sup>

Historically Cuba was an incredibly popular tourist destination for Americans. From the rich in the 1920's to the famous in the 1950's, inexpensive flights and even cheaper hotels attracted many American tourists. According to Cuba historian Louis Perez "Havana was then what Las Vegas has become." The glamour and sense of romantic adventure ended in the late 1950's when in 1959 Fidel Castro lead a successful guerrilla military revolt against US backed President Fulgencio Batista.<sup>23</sup>

1960 onwards boasted a series of rocky relations between the U.S. and Cuba. The violence of the new communist government, the nationalization of U.S. assets in Cuba, and the flagrant human rights abuses towards the Cuban people caused President John F. Kennedy to sign Proclamation 3447 to embargo all trade with Cuba.<sup>24</sup> The economic embargo was meant to bring the Castro regime to its knees and show that the United States did not support the new administration. After Kennedy cut of relations with Cuba, the situation drastically worsened. The combination of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis left no desire for Americans to repair the broken relationship between the once friendly nations.<sup>25</sup> Tensions continued to rise as hundreds of thousands of Cubans fled from human rights abuses and poverty of their home country to the United States. Tensions between the two nations reached another dangerously high point in 1996 when in response to Cuba shooting down two U.S. aircraft the U.S. Congress passed the Helms-Burton act, further cementing the economic embargo against Cuba and encouraging its allies to do the same.<sup>26</sup>

In passing the Helms-Burton Act, the United States congress re-affirmed and strengthened Kennedy's original embargo. The written intent of the act was to foster a "a peaceful transition to a representative democracy and market economy in Cuba." Included in the act are international sanctions against the Cuban government by economic embargo, prohibition of recognition of Fidel or Raúl Castro as transitional government in Cuba, and provides power to the Legislative Branch to override an Executive Branch cancellation of the embargo.<sup>27</sup> The wide scope of the act has been condemned by the EU and human rights organizations.<sup>28</sup>

In the early 2000's, relations with Cuba included disputes over the use and security of Guantanamo Bay, propaganda wars in Cuba's capital, and the imprisonment of Cuban and U.S. spies.<sup>29</sup> As the decade continued, however, the United States softened its approach in dealing with Cuba. From President George W. Bush personally urging Cubans to work together for democratic change to Senator Jeff Flake leading the largest congressional delegation to Cuba since 1959.<sup>30</sup>

One of the major catalysts in the fight to reestablish relations with Cuba was the transfer of power from Fidel Castro to his younger brother Raul in 2008.<sup>31</sup> Many American leaders saw this as an opportunity for change. By the end of the decade, under Raul Castro's leadership, Cuba's cold war mentality towards the United States began to thaw. While there were some hiccups on the path to reestablishing relations, such as US Citizen Alan Gross being detained in Cuba, within 10 years of Raul coming into power the travel ban was lifted for families and numerous large cultural exchanges began to take place.<sup>32</sup>

The most crucial step in re-establishing full relations with Cuba is to repeal the Helms Burton Act of 1996. While the President has the executive power to establish or terminate

diplomatic relations, a majority in both the Senate and the House are required to end congressional legislation. In an election year, this becomes increasingly risky because the president's predecessor will have the power to veto the bill to repeal the act. If that is the case, then it will take a 2/3 majority of both houses to override the veto.<sup>33</sup> With many in the Republican Party still opposed to ending the embargo and the looming prospect of a radical republican presidency, relations with Cuba may be put to a halt as quickly as they began.

In addition to the looming presidential drama, even under the best circumstances it is not easy for a president to repeal an embargo. It was not until 1994, 40 years after the trade embargo against Vietnam was instated, that it was finally repealed by President Clinton. Even then, he had a majority senate vote, 62-38, to support the action.<sup>34</sup> If President Obama were to try to repeal the embargo now, it is unlikely that he would have enough allies in congress to do so.

### **The Castros**

In addition to understanding the history between the U.S. and Cuba, it is critical to understand the brothers that plunged Cuba into a communist era and how their actions and attitudes towards the U.S. have affected the U.S. mentality of working with the Communist nation. It is also crucial to realize that a smoother transition to reestablishing full relations is in order because the reign of the Castros is ending. Fidel Castro has given his power as President of Cuba and head of the Cuban Communist Party to his brother Raul. In addition to the efforts he has already made in bringing about good relations with the U.S., Raul Castro has announced that he plans to retire from his position as President in 2018 and will no longer be party leader of the Communist Party by 2021.<sup>35</sup>

The Castro brothers have been in control of Cuba since 1959. As rulers of the nation, the Castros have been successful in reducing illiteracy, ending racism, expanding infrastructure, and improving public health care.<sup>36</sup> The regime, however, has been heavily criticized for its violation of human rights, especially by the United States. Economic and political freedoms are not widespread in Cuba and access to modern technology and the internet has been stifled.<sup>37</sup>

As mentioned earlier, before 2008 there was an overwhelming support throughout both the Republican and Democratic parties to keep Cuba shut out. It was considered a standard campaign promise, much like bettering education or keeping taxes low. In 2008, however, at age 76 Raul Castro took over the leadership of Cuba from his brother Fidel Castro.<sup>38</sup> This tipping point has opened doors for many reforms that were not present during Fidel Castro's regime. For example, while in 1992 Fidel Castro announced that Cuba would no longer support insurgents abroad, however, it wasn't until 2013 that the State Department's annual report conveyed that there was no evidence to support Cuba providing training or weapons to terrorist groups. Subsequently in May of 2015 Cuba was removed for the U.S.'s "state sponsor of terrorism" list.<sup>39</sup> This change was one of the most crucial steps to reestablishing full diplomatic relations with Cuba, and it is very unlikely that congress would consider repealing the economic embargo without it.

Since taking over for his brother, Raul Castro has expressed a much greater willingness to engage in relations with the United States. To be clear he is still plagued by the human rights violations associate with his brother's regime. For example, in 2015 the Cuban government performed over 8,600 detentions of political activists.<sup>40</sup> Despite stubbornness

to fully instate a democracy, Raul Castro has taken actions to bring Cuba into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by being willing to negotiate with the United States. Fidel Castro on the other hand still does not fully support relations with the U.S. In response to the December 2014 re-establishment of relations with Cuba Fidel Castro claimed that

“I don't trust the policy of the United States, nor have I exchanged a word with them, but this does not mean I reject a pacific solution to the conflicts.”<sup>41</sup>

Fidel Castro is understandably much more cautious of the intentions of the government of the United States. Considering that he was in charge of Cuba during the Bay of Pigs invasion, Cuban missile crisis, and the war against Angola in the 1970's distrust of a long time enemy is not surprising.<sup>42</sup> In March of 2016 when President Obama visited the island he met with Raul Castro, but made no effort to also meet with Fidel Castro. In turn, Fidel Castro had no interest in discussing anything with the President of the United States.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Beginning of New Relations**

After decades of conflict, Cuba's relationships with the United States began under the effect of two peaceful and powerful world leaders. First in 2013 at the funereal of Nelson Mandela, President Obama and Raul Castro shook hands. This simple act was the one of the first times since the Cold War that the two heads of state from the U.S. and Cuba had an encounter with one another. While it is doubtful that Fidel Castro would have done the same, this encounter helped to bring about change in diplomatic policy.<sup>44</sup>

The second influencer in opening to relations in Cuba was Pope Francis. In early 2014 Pope Francis met with President Obama and lobbied for the embargo against Cuba to be



lifted. According to Havana's Archbishop Cardinal Jaime Ortega y Alamino, who was serving to help the Church's efforts in opening negotiations between the two countries,

"The Pope brought Cuba up... Cuba's role in Latin America, and how it was important not just for Cuba but all of Latin America, that the detrimental economic measures be lifted."<sup>45</sup>

Since the Pope's intervention Castro and Obama have met three times, diplomatic relations have been re-established, the Embassy's in Havana and Washington D.C have been reopened, President Obama has visited Cuba with his Family and a large delegation, and travel restrictions for U.S. citizens have been somewhat lifted.<sup>46</sup> While it will require Congress' repeal of the Helms-Burton act in order to end the embargo, the President does have the short term power to open relations in industries such as trade, investment, telecommunications, agriculture, and travel. President Obama, however, is not the only American president to use executive power to work at relations with Cuba. In 2003 President George W Bush made the decision to reauthorize the export of some U.S agricultural products to Cuba<sup>47</sup>. This action meant to help American farmers helped to set a precedent for executive authority in relations with Cuba.

### **Arguments for and Against Relations with Cuba**

As relations with Cuba have warmed, the change has created two strong contrasting opinions. Listed below are some of the major reasons given for wanting to continue the embargo against Cuba. While some of these opinions clash directly with the reasons for ending the embargo against Cuba, many of the notions are based on the idea that the U.S. needs to keep its promises, end human rights abuses, and not give into the terroristic

dictatorship of Cuba. The arguments focus on fighting the actions of Government of Cuba.

In a sense, proponents for embargo want to do so because they believe that it is a tool to teach the Cuban government a lesson and to back out of the conditions set in 1960.

Cons for ending the embargo with Cuba<sup>48</sup>

- **Cuba has not fulfilled the conditions set by the Helms-Burton Act**
- **The U.S. could look weak if it terminated the embargo before the Cuban government meet the requirements set by U.S. law**
- **The Cuban government has consistently responded with acts of aggression to US attempts to soften the embargo, what would happen if the embargo was completely lifted?**
- **The embargo allows the United States to have leverage against the Cuban government in response to human rights abuses**
- **Because of the lack of private sectors in Cuba, eliminating the embargo would only help the Cuban government**
- **The United States provide assistance to Cuban citizens because of the embargo**
- **Because of the uncertainty regarding Raúl Castro's successor, the embargo is a powerful bargaining chip in Cuba's future**
- **Older generation of Cuban Americans, the people who understand the situation best, support the embargo**
- **Open travel will not activate change in Cuba because most other democratic countries already can travel to Cuba and this has not brought about any results**

- **President Obama is a major proponent of the action to re-establish relations with Cuba.**

On the other end of the spectrum, those against the embargo see it as a failure and an embarrassment to the United States. Arguments for ending the embargo center on free trade, accountability for the Cuban government, and that after over have a century it is time for a change in tactics.

Pro for ending the embargo with Cuba<sup>49</sup>

- **The 50+ year policy and subsequent embargo against Cuba has not worked**
- **The embargo is a relic of Cold War Era thinking**
- **The embargo harms the US economy by restricting U.S. exports to Cuba**
- **The embargo harms Cuban people**
- **The United States should not have different trading and travel policies for Cuba because there are other countries governments that the U.S. opposes, but does not enforce a travel ban**
- **Over 80% of democrats and over 50% of republicans are in favor of diplomatic ties and open travel and trade policies with Cuba**
- **Most Cuban Americans think the embargo is not working**
- **Free trade and not the isolationist policies can work to promote democracy in Cuba**
- **Lifting the embargo would put pressure on Cuba to address problems that it had previously blamed on US sanctions**

- **Most of the world opposes the embargo and continuing the embargo has put the U.S. at odds with many ally countries**
- **Cubans are cut off from the development of technology**

Despite contrasting end results, both points of view share some characteristics: democracy is necessary, human rights abuses should not go unchecked, and the course of action taken by the United States will affect Cuba for the better. While one side proclaims that free trade is the key to democracy the dissent warns that Cuba needs to be a democracy before the U.S. can engage them in trade. Embargo supporters want to use the Embargo to control human rights abuses, those against the embargo believe that when the embargo ends the human rights abuses will die with it. Finally, those for the embargo think that continuing the embargo will help the people of Cuba because it will put pressure on the government to reform. Those against the embargo believe that tearing down the embargo will open up a path for Cubans to demand their own democracy.

At the core of the arguments, the biggest difference between the two groups is that one sees the embargo as a tool for democracy and the other views it as an obstacle to democracy. While the Democratic party is in a consensus of how to view the embargo, Republicans are split. Looking within the Republican Party, one of the greatest contrast in opinions in dealing with Cuba is between two similar Senators; Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah and Senator Jeff Flake of Arizona. Both are from western states, share the same religion, have a reputation of working on a bi-partisan level, and are pro-Israel, yet have polarized opinions when it comes to Cuba.<sup>50 51</sup>

## **Sen. Jeff Flake and Cuba**

Senator Jeff Flake is no stranger to working in foreign relations. As a LDS missionary in South Africa, as both a Congressman and Senator of a border state, working at the Goldwater institute, and as the Executive Director of the Foundation for Democracy in Namibia Senator Flake has had countless opportunities function as a bridge between two nations. With this back ground, it is no surprise Senator Flake works to defend free trade and to open up relations with Cuba.<sup>52</sup>

Upon president Obama's announcement of reestablishing diplomatic relations with Cuba Senator Flake remarked

"While there may have been a compelling case for the embargo during the height of the Cold War, those arguments clearly no longer apply. Easing trade and travel should not be viewed as a concession or reward to the Castro regime."<sup>53</sup>

Senator Flake has worked since the early 2000's to help re-establish relations with the Cuban government. Leading a delegation in 2001, visiting Cuba with president Obama in 2016, and supporting multiple measures to foster diplomatic relations with Cuba in between, Senator Flake has been one of the most adamant proponents of reestablishing relations with Cuba on either side<sup>54</sup>.

"It always bothered me that as a Republican we preach the gospel of contact and commerce and trade and travel, yet with Cuba we turn around and say, 'No, it's not going to work there.' It just seemed to be a glaring inconsistency in our foreign policy."<sup>55</sup>

While Flake does not support the Castro regime's actions, he believes that free trade and fewer restrictions against Cuba is the best way to combat injustice and force change.

"I've always believed that multilateral sanctions sometimes work, but unilateral sanctions rarely, if ever, do. And that's what we've had here in Cuba...We engage often in Washington in this kind of drive-by diplomacy where in the heat of the moment we'll impose economic sanctions, and then we'll forget about it. Poor countries are saddled with the legacy of it. And that's not fair."<sup>56</sup>

Senator Flake believes that "our sanctions haven't been effective" and that the lack of effectiveness has made the United States

"A very convenient scapegoat for the failures of socialism. It's always David-and-Goliath syndrome. They've been able to point at us and say, "That's the reason that socialism doesn't work."<sup>57</sup>

### **Sen. Orrin Hatch and Cuba**

As an official response to President Obama reestablishing relations with Cuba Senator Orrin G Hatch stated that

"Time and again, President Obama has predicated his foreign policy on the notion that if we simply accommodate the demands of troublesome regimes, they will cease their disturbing behavior...I remain committed to a Cuba policy that continues to place pressure on the Castro regime until the Cuban people are free."<sup>58</sup>

Senator Hatch holds the traditional viewpoint that in order to defeat Cuba the United States should not back down from the promises that it has made.

While Senator Hatch has not been extremely outspoken since the president's move to reopen relations with Cuba, his record in actions relating to Cuba does not support the Cuban government. In 1996 Senator Hatch voted for the Helms-Burton act to strengthen the trade embargo against Cuba and throughout his career has been a strong proponent against working with the Castro brothers.<sup>59</sup>

### **Reconciling the Republican Party**

The disconnect between these two Senators represents the internal debate the Republican party is going through. While the majority of the Republican party agrees that the Castro Regime human right's abuses shouldn't be taken lightly, some Republican senators are taking a step in a different direction in order to solve the problem. Introduced in January of 2015, Senator Flake introduced S.299- Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act of 2015. As the next step in dissolving the Helms-Burton Act of 1996, this act was intended to secure the freedom to travel to Cuba of U.S. citizens This Act had 48 co-sponsors, including 8 Republicans.<sup>60</sup> With so much discord, the best explanation for what is happening within the Republican party is that 1) some Senators trust trade and believe that ending the isolationist policies is what is best for their state and the nation and 2) senators who normally believe in trade are letting prejudice cloud their judgement.

Senator Hatch and many other Republican senators are letting this cultural identity cloud their judgment about what the U.S. should do in present relations with Cuba, Senator Hatch represents a much older generation. Senator Hatch's cultural identity is that of someone who was born in the 1930's and lived most of his adult life through the cold war and the rise and fear of communism. He is someone who believes in less federal government

control and has a strong background in law, finance, and economics.<sup>61</sup> Senator Hatch even supported China joining the WTO, but still denies that the U.S. should try ending its isolationist policies with regards to Cuba.<sup>62</sup> The traditionalist viewpoint of the Republican party is prejudicing its action for the future.

Senator Flake was born two years after the embargo against Cuba began and wasn't even 30 by the time the Berlin Wall had fallen. Senator Flake's age in combination with his professional experience has created a cultural identity that has clearly led him to be more accepting of relations with Cuba. Senator Flake has spent his adult years in an era of ever increasing and ever important international and free trade, just as Senator Hatch spent his adult years in the height of the Cold War. Jeff Flake is a millennial-friendly politician and Orrin Hatch is not. Despite similar backgrounds in religious identity and state location, the prejudice towards what Cuba has been and the viewpoint of what it can become is the force pulling their stances on Cuba so far apart.

### **The Generation Gap**

The clashing opinions of Senators Hatch and Flake represent the ideals and generational change that is taking place in the United States. According to a Pew research center report, in 2015 millennials (born between 1982 and 2002) represented 34% of the labor force, while Generations X (born 1965- 1984) and Baby boomers (born 1946-1964) represented 34% and 29% respectively.<sup>63 64</sup> In a Gallup survey from March of 2016, 34% of Republicans have a "favorable" view of Cuba, while in total 54% of Americans have a favorable view of Cuba. This is a dramatic increase from the 10% of Americans holding a favorable view of Cuba in 1996.<sup>65</sup>



Millennials are changing U.S. policy because policy makers need to cater to their preferences in order to remain in office. Millennials do not remember the Cold War. Millennials do not have the same perception of isolationist policies having grown up in a world completely connected by the internet and cellular devices and therefore do not see the world as isolated countries. 69% of Millennials support free trade agreements, a percentage that is higher than any other generation.<sup>66</sup> Democrats have accepted this change and have taken actions to appeal to the millennial generation, while most Republicans are focused on keeping traditional voters happy.<sup>67</sup> According to a 2015 Pew Research Center poll, millennials are the largest age group for the Democratic party, with 51% of millennials identifying as Democrats compared to the 35% who identify as Republicans.<sup>68</sup>

Despite widespread approval of terminating the Helms-Burton Act, it is going to take at least another decade for the embargo with Cuba to end. Currently, millennials make up 34% of the country's workforce, but in 2025 it is estimated that they will comprise nearly 75% of the workforce.<sup>69</sup> If millennial voters presently have the power to influence decisions, then in a decade they will have the power to make changes. In a decade many senators will be replaced and the Castro brothers will no longer be in power. The combination of the end of the Castro reign and overwhelming public support will help to ensure the end of the embargo.

The 8 Republicans from Arkansas, Arizona, Kansas, Kentucky, Nevada, Wyoming, and Maine who support S. 299 represent the future of the Republican party. These senators have put aside any Republican prejudice in favor of international trade and cooperation.<sup>70</sup>

Presently the Silent Generation (born between 1925-1945) is the most Republican of any generation.<sup>71</sup> As the years' progress, however, Republicans need to cater to a different generation or face the possibility of becoming an obsolete party. As millennials come to makeup the majority of the workforce, it is important to consider what they want from the government. As technology natives who support free trade, this generation will be looking for representatives and leaders that reflect the same values.

### **Why U.S. Relations with Cuba Matter**

*In order to understand the United States' future actions towards Cuba one must ask why do the contradicting opinions about relations with Cuba matter? Why does the United States care about doing business with an economically backwards country that has disregarded human rights for the past half century? What would happen if the United States does not secure full economic relations with Cuba?*

First, understanding the fight in abolishing the Cuba trade embargo. The desire to end the embargo against Cuba is born from a generation and a mindset that free trade is the most powerful force for democracy. The previous half century of relations with Cuba was clouded by the perception that democracy is the force that enables prosperity, instead of the other way around. The fierceness in the opposing opinions is important because if opening trade with Cuba results in their transition out of a communistic state, then the U.S. will have solid evidence that trade is the greatest force for democracy and that isolationist policies do not punish tyrannical leaders, but hurt the country as a whole.

Second, understanding what is at stake for Americans by opening up relations with Cuba. To the United States, Cuba has an incredibly strong symbolic importance. Despite Cuba's

close proximity, it was a Cold War enemy and a physical representation of the evils of communism. As an enemy and conspirator with the Soviet Union in a time of nuclear buildup, the poor nation was able to leverage an incredible amount of power. The United States hated that it no longer had a controllable ally. Rebuilding relations with Cuba would signal to the world the dismantling of one of the last remnants of the Cold War and America's fear of Communism. By tearing down this wall and establishing an open relationship with Cuba the United States is showing that it truly believes in the power and influence of American democracy. Opening up free trade to an impoverished market of 11.2 million people does have some positive financial implications, but reputation and care for human rights are what are crucial in the U.S's relations with Cuba<sup>72</sup>. By establishing positive relations with Cuba the United States will no longer be seen as unreasonable by many of its international allies. By establishing relations with Cuba the United States can truly put its democracy to work to see if simple exposure to American democracy is enough to end communism and save human rights.

Third, understanding what the United States would lose if relations with Cuba were destroyed and how it could be detrimental for the future. The Cold War is over, but Cold War sentiment is not. With Putin's recent aggressions in the Ukraine and unwillingness to work with the United States, being on good terms with Cuba is beneficial to the U.S. If another cold conflict is coming into place because of Russian aggression, then having Cuba as a friend would lessen any pressure that Russia may try to bring on the U.S. Despite being a poor island, Cuba is not useless or a prop. As recently as November of 2015, the Cuban army came to the aid of Russian troops and fighters in Syria. This is certainly not the first

time Cuban troops have come to the aid of Russian fighters, as Cuban troops fought alongside Russians in Africa and in the Middle east in the 1970's and 1980's. In another measure of support and friendship, President Vladimir Putin wrote off \$32 billion of Cuba's debt to Russia, promised to assist in Cuba oil explorations, and reopened a Russian Cold War spy base south of Havana.<sup>73</sup> These advancements with Cuba are not coincidental, but are retaliation against the U.S. for interfering with Russia's advancements in Ukraine. In order to keep the increasingly aggressive Russians at bay the United States needs to reestablish relations with Cuba so that if a conflict between the U.S. and Russia arises, if the U.S. does not have Cuba's support at least it will not have Cuba as an enemy.

### **Conclusion**

Unless a new dictator violently seizes power, Cuba and U.S. relations are going to work out, just not as perfectly as either side would hope. With the messy game of politics, it is unclear the near future with Cuba. The election of a Republican president could freeze progress in ending the embargo until the vast majority of the Republican Party is in favor of establishing relations. At the election of a Democrat, the U.S. would experience executive power being used to ease restrictions on relations with Cuba until congress gives in and passes a new bill to vanquish the Helms-Burton act.

Those against the embargo will have to wait a few more years in order to see the embargo completely repealed. Those for the embargo may feel like the U.S. is giving into Cuban demands, but will see the end of the Castro brothers in control of the government. Both sides will see an increase in democratic freedoms for the Cuban people once the isolationist policy is fully abolished and the Castro brothers are no longer in control of the country.

The two most important developments in reestablishing relations with Cuba have been the change in Cuban American voting preferences and the transfer of power from Fidel to Raul Castro. Without both of these occurrences, relations with Cuba would not be possible.

Without the change brought about by young Cuban American voters, elected officials would have no push to try to reestablish relations with Cuba. Without the transition of power from Fidel to Raul Castro, it is unlikely that Cuba would've extended a hand to meet and work problems out with the United States.

Looking to the future, it will be millennial support that elects the officials to abolish the embargo against Cuba. The traditional isolationist view of dealing with Cuba is being phased out in favor of action. A generation that has grown up constantly connected to the world around them is applying that same principle to international trade and relations.

## **Reflective Writing**

Putting together this paper was a rollercoaster to say the least. After bouncing between various subjects, I finally settled on the Cuban embargo because of the relevance and complexity of the situation. I understood that Americans could not travel to Cuba, but that was the extent of my knowledge. Despite the human rights violations that are taking place, I wondered if we are causing a greater crime by isolating the people of Cuba. I was also curious why after 50 years of adamant opposition the United States was taking action to reestablish relations with Cuba. After the past year of research and analytical reflection, though, it exasperates me that after 55 years the United States is still isolating Cuba.

I first became aware of the depth of the situation while interning in Senator Hatch's office in the spring of 2015. There I learned that many of Senator Hatch's Republican staffers supported friendlier relations with Cuba while the Senator did not. While researching for the office, I learned that while the Senator did care about the Cuban people, he was adamantly opposed to the Castro regime. This triggered the question, do all Republican Senators think like this? I could understand that the vast majority of Democrats would be in favor of this change because President Obama was leading the effort. I was curious to find if all Republican leaders thought the same way.

Beginning my official research, I found that one of the people most in favor of reestablishing relations with Cuba was Republican Senator Jeff Flake. Ever since being elected to congress in the early 2000's, Flake had worked tirelessly to help to reestablish relations with Cuba. Researching further I found that over half of the Republicans in the

country supported opening relations with Cuba. I realized that this issue was not just along party lines, but had an age component as well.

My initial hypothesis that the millennial generation is affecting the United States' attitude towards relations with Cuba was supported by the change in Cuban American voting patterns. For the first time in 2010, the Cuban American vote swung democratic. This change reflected the influence and incorporation of the millennial generation. Towards the end of working on my paper, Shannon my advisor and mentor pointed out that I did not have anything on the Democratic side to support my generational argument. This was incredibly frustrating, but I found that it made my paper stronger.

Some of the challenges and problems I faced while working on my project include a lack of data and keeping up with current events. It was sometimes difficult to write this paper because a lot of the data I wanted wasn't available. While I had access to Pew research and Gallup polls, they often did not go deep enough. Especially where a lot of the information I was trying to understand was split by both age and political party, the information I was looking at was not as perfectly neat as I would've liked. Another challenging aspect of this project is that relations with Cuba are still developing. And while many proposals have been introduced in both the House and Senate this year, none have passed the committee level.

Additionally, I do not recommend waiting until the last minute to finish up your paper. While I have loved this project, and have really appreciated the support from my thesis

advisor I wish I would've finished this at least two weeks before graduation. To any future honors graduates who may be reading this, DO NOT I repeat DO NOT procrastinate your project. It is a lot more fun getting feedback when you have multiple months to implement it instead of weeks. After I had finished 99% of my paper, I was a little disappointed to have a conversation with someone about the human rights implications of ending the Cuban embargo. It was such an interesting conversation and I would've loved to look at it more in depth. I wish I would've had a discussion with a completely fresh set of eyes during the middle of my project so that I could see beyond my own and Shannon's biases. Finally, I would recommend formatting citations as soon as you find them because it saves a lot of time later on. I made the mistake of saving all of my sources as website links. While this is much better than forgetting save anything or just leaving website tabs open, there would've been a lot less hassle for me during the editing period of my paper.

I think that my greatest triumph with this project is finishing it. Obviously there is the satisfying feeling of finding the perfect article to finish off a compelling argument, but I really enjoyed the entire journey of writing this paper. I know that the term millennial is such a buzzword right now, but it was exciting to learn how much of a difference the generation is actually making.

My first piece of advice, when picking a capstone project, is to find an area you are passionate about and get to work. Give yourself enough time to understand the subject, then find a question. I would also highly recommend to do an internship in conjunction with the thesis project, especially for business majors. I recommend this because, at least for me, it helped me to find where my true passion was. The projects that I received in



Senator Hatch's office helped me to realize that international business meant a lot of things. Besides trade, international business also focuses on international relations, selling into international markets, and working with suppliers and distributors worldwide. In Senator Hatch's office I learned that the international relations side of international business is crucial, especially doing business in a nation that has hundreds of different trading relationships.

As an international business major I had the luxury to be able to focus on any global event that would effect international business. Amidst that luxury, however, I found that there were so many events going on in the world. Some initial ideas included: how to take down the Islamic State, understanding how human trafficking effects countries, and discovering the implications of China's maritime aggression. While these topics were intriguing I found that the mystery of Cuba is what really captivated my attention. That captivation led to a subject that I could actually write about instead of just wanting to write about.

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### About the Author

Victoria Rasmussen Beazer is a proud Texan and even prouder Aggie. She graduated from Utah State University in the spring of 2016 as a dual major in International Business and Marketing with a French minor. After her first year of college, she discovered her gypsy soul. To satisfy her wanderlust she traveled as a part of three different study abroad programs and attended an international women's conference in Dubai. In the Huntsman School of Business, she was a part of the Huntsman Scholar Program, President of the Society for International Business and Economic Development, and in the Buehler Scholar leadership program. She enjoys going on morning runs, reading, cooking, and watching old movies with her husband Rex. She hopes one day to get a masters degree in either international trade or marketing and to adopt a cat. Ideally, in the future she would like to open a consulting firm to help small businesses market their products in foreign markets.